Upper Neuse River Basin Association Communication Plan

Prepared by HDR September 2018





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Goals and Objectives of the Communication Plan

The Upper Neuse River Basin Association (UNRBA) was formed in 1996 to provide an ongoing forum for cooperative water quality protection and water resource management in the Upper Neuse River Basin's 770-square-mile watershed. In 2011, the Association refined its bylaws to focus on assisting its local government members in their efforts to address issues of mutual concern related to water quality and wastewater management in the Falls Lake watershed.

To that end, the UNRBA's mission is two-fold: to help its members comply with the Stage I of the Falls Lake Rules and to jointly reevaluate the Stage II rules in order to develop an updated nutrient management strategy that will improve water quality through the application of innovative and cost-effective principles of watershed management. This Communication Plan will guide the UNRBA's outreach strategy as it seeks to develop and secure that revised strategy by facilitating the following outcomes.

I. Social and Political Acceptance

Communication efforts will reach and engage audiences whose social and political acceptance is important to the successful adoption of an updated Falls Lake Nutrient Management Strategy. Social acceptance implies an understanding that a reconsidered strategy is needed for the Upper Neuse River Basin, while political acceptance means the consent and support needed to secure adoption of a technically, logistically, and financially feasible strategy.

II. Stakeholder Consent

Communication efforts will engage stakeholders in the UNRBA's work throughout the process of reexamining the Falls Lake nutrient management strategy. Successful engagement will foster stakeholder understanding of and consent to the UNRBA's approach to the reexamination and the recommendations produced through that process. Consent is understood to include a range of stakeholder positions from support to a willingness not to block the recommendations resulting from the UNRBA's reexamination efforts.

III. A Reputation for Collaboration

The UNRBA is a collaborative body. Its communications will help to develop its public reputation as a successful agent in promoting collaborative water quality management in the Upper Neuse Basin of North Carolina and beyond.

IV. Good Stewardship

The work of the UNRBA will help catalyze water quality stewardship throughout the Basin.



Target Audiences and Stakeholders

Priority Audiences

In support of the Association's reexamination goals, this plan prioritizes local elected officials, state elected officials, and community advocacy groups as audiences. The table below identifies the most important takeaways that the UNRBA's communication efforts will impress upon each priority group.

Target Audience	Key Takeaways
	Consultants retained by the UNRBA have determined that the Stage II nutrient management rules as currently written are not technologically, fiscally, or logistically feasible. 1
Local government policymakers	The UNRBA's cooperative path forward is directed at maintaining and improving water quality while being mindful of financial burdens.
City and Town Council Members County Board of Commission Members	Efforts to date have contributed to improvements in lower Falls Lake, including areas near the City of Raleigh's water supply intake.
	Success requires partners across the Upper Neuse River Basin to maximize the results they can achieve with the resources available.
	The UNRBA's partnership-based approach is the "best deal in town," and investing in its efforts will be worth the reward.
Elected state government policymakers	Maintaining the viability of Falls Lake requires a long-term, science-based management strategy. To get there, the existing strategy must be reexamined and improved.
State legislators	The Basin needs practical solutions that will produce tangible results.
Governor	The UNRBA's collaborative approach to a new strategy will successfully balance many legitimate needs.

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¹ Pg. ES-9 to 10, https://www.unrba.org/sites/default/files/Cardno_Task_1_TM_06_21_2013_FINAL.pdf

Target Audience	Key Takeaways
	 Participation in this effort is good for the future of the Basin's water quality and the quality of life of its residents. The UNRBA's approach may provide a viable process for other stakeholders in North Carolina to follow as they work to improve watershed management in their basins.
	An effective approach to water quality management will balance science, policy, and financial investment.
	Through significant effort, basin jurisdictions have already made progress to maintain and improve water quality.
Public interest and environmental	Current efforts to maintain and improve water quality protect Falls Lake as a water supply
groups	The UNRBA is seeking a series of actions that will maintain and improve water quality in the lake, including conservation of undeveloped land in the watershed.
	Future progress depends on the development of a strategy that can be implemented.
	The UNRBA and local jurisdictions are dedicated to the efficient use of organizational resources.
Other regulated entities	It is important to secure a viable nutrient management strategy for Falls Lake.
Development community Agricultural operators NCDOT	Joint support from all of the Basin's regulated entities and land users will help to secure approval for the proposed strategy.
State and Federal facilities Institutional facilities	Practical and effective regulations would reward different kinds of land users for working together to reduce overall nutrient loading.
Industrial operators	An updated strategy should treat all regulated entities equitably and fairly.



Target Audience		Key Takeaways
	•	Collaborating with the UNRBA will improve stakeholder support around a viable and scientifically-sound nutrient management strategy.
Regulatory agencies	•	Reaching agreement on modeling and assessment tool viability will allow the reexamination process to focus efforts on development of an updated Nutrient Management Strategy.
NC Department of Environmental Quality NC Division of Water Resources	•	A clearly-established, mutually agreeable process for reexamination will serve regulating agencies, regulated entities, and water quality improvement well.
EPA Region 4	•	The UNRBA's science- and stakeholder-centric reexamination process is capable of producing a technically, financially, logistically, and politically tenable approach to nutrient management and protection of all lake uses.
	•	Consideration of innovative approaches to an updated and improved Nutrient Management Strategy for Falls Lake will result in more effective implementation of nutrient management actions.

During a May 2018 communication workshop facilitated by HDR, UNRBA members also identified the importance of continuing to communicate with administrative state policymakers (i.e., Division of Water Resources, Department of Environmental Quality, Environmental Management Commission, Wildlife Resource Commission), EPA Region 4, and the North Carolina Policy Collaboratory at UNC. Under the direction of its Executive Director and the efforts of its members, the UNRBA's cooperation with these entities should continue throughout the term of this plan.

Other Audiences

In the long term, the UNRBA is committed to reaching all of the audiences interested in and impacted by the Falls Lake Nutrient Management Strategy. Current time and resource constraints limit focused engagement on all audience groups at present. However, more robust outreach and engagement will be a specific consideration in future plans:

- Members of the Basin's general public
- Public interest groups at the regional, state and national level
- Federal government regulators and policymakers
- News media
- Academic institutions



- Business owners
- Tourists and recreational visitors
- Organizations or individuals outside the Basin
- Other watershed organizations and communities that are facing similar situations



Key Messages

Key messages are the main ideas that the UNRBA's target audiences should hear and remember. They lead to the takeaways listed in the section above by summarizing what the UNRBA is doing and explaining why and how. The key messages will inform the content of the communication tools listed in the next section.

Theme 1: What is the UNRBA and what does it do?

For over 20 years, the UNRBA has provided an effective forum in the Basin for considering and promoting cooperative approaches to water quality planning and management.

Sample supporting information

- > The UNRBA's members represent seven of the eight municipalities in the Upper Neuse River Basin, all six of its counties, local soil and water conservation districts, and a regional water and sewer authority.
- > The UNRBA has been providing an ongoing forum for cooperation on water quality protection in the Basin since 1996, with a more recent focus on developing a more reasonable and productive strategy for managing nutrient levels in Falls Lake.
- > UNRBA member governmental organizations were a driving force in the development of the Consensus Principles that provided an outline for Stage I of the Falls Lake Rules and introduced the adaptive management principles which inspired the Strategy's reexamination process.
- > Following the adoption of the Falls Lake Strategy and Rules by the state Environmental Management Commission in 2010, the UNRBA refocused its efforts to help local government members to comply with Stage I and develop an improved management strategy that addresses the goals of Stage II.
- > The UNRBA is dedicated to helping members jointly develop an updated strategy to give the Basin a better chance of improving water quality through the application of innovative and cost-effective principles of watershed management.

UNRBA and its members are dedicated to maintaining and improving water quality in the Basin. Important strides have already been made.

Sample supporting information

In 2012, local governments across the entire watershed implemented requirements to prevent new development from allowing nutrient runoff from project sites to increase. In some cases, the new regulations have even reduced loading in comparison with the predevelopment loading levels.



- The UNRBA's local government members have invested in nutrient-reducing retrofits to their wastewater treatment plants. As a results, the facilities release at least 20 percent less nitrogen and at least 40 percent less phosphorous to Falls Lake than they did before.
- > Local jurisdictions have planned and are moving forward with projects to help offset nutrient loading from existing development.
- > The Division of Water Resources and the Environmental Management Commission designed Stage I to protect Falls Lake as a source of drinking water. Evidence suggests that collective efforts have improved water quality in the lower lake at and around the City of Raleigh's water intake facility.
- > The UNRBA's scientific work through its Nutrient Credits Project has developed new and improved nutrient reduction practices.² The impact of this work will extend beyond the Basin to help water managers across North Carolina.
- > Agricultural representatives in the watershed have been working through the Watershed Oversight Committee to track and document reductions in nutrient loading from agricultural sources. Progress reports from the Committee's Agricultural Implementation Group show that reductions in agricultural nitrogen runoff have already satisfied Stage I requirements.

Good policy requires sound science. We are dedicated to improving the scientific understanding of how our watershed works.

Sample supporting information

- > Through its members' support, the UNRBA has invested \$800,000 per year over the last four years in robust water quality monitoring and modeling work.
- > The UNRBA's multi-year water quality monitoring program and modeling effort will result in the development of sophisticated decision-making tools. When complete, these tools will be able to help us evaluate the options for building a better nutrient management strategy.

Theme 2: Why is the UNRBA focused on reexamining the Falls Lake Nutrient Management Strategy and Rules?

The work of our consultants indicates that the current regulations include goals that are technologically unachievable. Working toward the impossible can discourage meaningful actions to improve water quality and protect the recognized uses of the lake.

² Details at https://unrba.org/nutrient-credit-program



Sample supporting information

- > Stage II currently requires local governments to reduce the phosphorous loading contribution from existing development to Falls Lake by 77 percent compared to 2006 levels. Based on the studies performed by the UNRBA's consultant, no existing technology can accomplish this.3
- > To achieve the 40 percent nitrogen reduction goal for existing development set by Stage II, the UNRBA's subject matter expert consultant concluded that every acre of existing development in the watershed would have to be retrofitted with specific types of nutrient control measures. This isn't realistic given the Basin's limited opportunities for installing retrofits, its soil types, existing development patterns, and the prohibitive cost of retrofits on this scale.4

The existing nutrient management strategy comes with an extreme price tag that may only produce limited benefits, particularly because current information indicates that the designated uses of Falls Lake are already being met.

Sample supporting information

- > The State of North Carolina estimates that Stage II would cost the Basin over \$1 billion. More recent estimates suggest that this figure is probably too low.⁵
- > According to a 2013 evaluation, each household in the watershed would have to contribute \$1,400 per year to fund the kind of actions necessary to pursue the Stage II goals, or over \$1,600 per household in 2018 dollars. The US EPA's tools for evaluating financial burdens to communities categorize this as a "large financial impact."6
- > A locally-informed recreational use model indicates that an investment of \$67.5 million per year in nutrient management across the Upper Neuse River Basin would only return \$168,000 in recreational value improvements because today's water quality already supports the recreational uses of the lake.⁷
- > The Lake supports a healthy fishery with today's water quality conditions. Nutrientrelated fish kills, which result from low levels of oxygen in the water, have not been reported.8
- > Falls Lake currently provides safe drinking water for over 500,000 residents. The UNRBA is working diligently to find better ways to continue to protect and improve Falls Lake as a water resource.

³ Pg. ES-18, https://www.unrba.org/sites/default/files/Cardno Task 1 TM 06 21 2013 FINAL.pdf

⁴ Pg. ES-18, *ibid*.

⁵ Pg. ES-9, *ibid*. ⁶ Pg. 3-5, *ibid*.

⁷ Pg. ES-18, ibid

⁸ Pg. ES-1, ibid and pg. 14 https://www.unrba.org/sites/default/files/reexam-files/UNRBA%20Modeling%20QAPP%201.0- 02%2028%202018-ApprovedForWebsite.pdf>.



Theme 3: How is the UNRBA approaching the reexamination?

Our objective is to develop a nutrient management strategy that protects all lake uses and encourages jurisdictions to invest in actions that results in improved water quality in Falls Lake.

The strategy for Falls Lake needs to foster broad participation by and cooperation among the entities it regulates. We believe that this defines the best path toward a workable solution that is acceptable to all stakeholders, protective of the Lake and mindful of financial burdens.

Reexamination will allow us to access the benefits of adaptive management and pursue, over the coming years, an iterative process that takes advantage of new data and "lessons learned" to hone resource management strategies over time.

Sample supporting information

- When the Falls Lake Rules were adopted in 2010, existing water quality data was limited. The State did not have the resources or the time to conduct comprehensive studies to address key gaps before modeling was completed and the rules were adopted.
- When our monitoring and modeling work is complete, we will have a more complete scientific understanding of the lake and its watershed. We will bring these scientific findings to our stakeholders to foster transparency and build consensus around a revised nutrient management strategy.

Good policy requires sound science, but science alone cannot tell us how to balance competing wants and needs. We will ask our stakeholders to share input to help us to develop an approach capable of generating widespread support.

Sample supporting information

- > The UNRBA has engaged and will continue to reach out to local governments, agricultural representatives, other regulated entities, environmental groups, community advocates, developers, and others.
- > The UNRBA hosts stakeholder meetings twice per year for its modeling project. These meetings seek specific feedback from stakeholders on the assumptions the model makes and next steps in its development.
- > The UNRBA will continue stakeholder participation during the process of identifying potential strategies and evaluating those with the scientific tools it will have developed.



Communication Tools and Tactics

Communication tools for the UNRBA should be developed and implemented in phases – in line with short-term, medium-term, and longer-term communications priorities and resource constraints.

Key short-term priorities

- > Establish the base visual collateral and outreach assets for distribution by the UNRBA to member organizations and dissemination to target audiences
- > Leverage the electronic distribution channels of member organizations to communicate the UNRBA's initiatives

Key medium and longer-term priorities

- > Continue to enhance the UNRBA's reputation as a trusted voice in the Upper Neuse River Basin
- > Develop a library of robust communications tools owned and managed by the UNRBA (i.e., UNRBA social media accounts, newsletters, periodic reports)

Tools in Development

HDR's 2018 scope of work for communications support includes the development of a core set of communication tools. The tools were selected to address the UNRBA's most pressing needs based on information shared during a communications workshop facilitated by HDR in May 2018 (for reference please see Communications Workshop Report at this link). These tools will be presented to the UNRBA Board of Directors during its November 21, 2018 meeting.

The following section summarizes each tool's purpose, recommends delivery methods to key audiences, and suggests information that should be gathered to support adaptive updates to content and delivery strategy.

Multi-purpose infographic

A one-page, multi-purpose infographic will provide a succinct overview of the UNRBA, its achievements, and the rules reexamination. The document will rely on graphics to communicate fundamental ideas in an engaging way.

The table below includes recommendations on delivery methods and use tracking for the multipurpose tool.



Recommended Delivery Methods	Responsibility	Recommended Use Tracking
Present during council or commission meetings and workshops as a visual aid for local governing body members. When possible, distribute printed copy in person during one-on-one preparatory conversations at least two weeks prior.	UNRBA members representing jurisdictions	Brief post-meeting summaries should be recorded and include: Date and occasion shared Names of elected officials reached Questions prompted by infographic Qualitative observations, e.g., observable changes in level of understanding, uncertainties or objections expressed
Provide to state-level elected officials	UNRBA Executive Director and UNRBA representatives	Director and other distributors should record: Date and medium of distribution Recipients name and titles, including geography represented Notes on any conversation spurred by contact, including qualitative notes on observable changes in level of understanding, uncertainties or objections expressed, etc.
Highlight on SquareSpace website	HDR	See website analytics, below.
Circulate via social media posts or paid advertisements. If distributor has the ability to run paid Facebook advertising, share via "brand awareness" campaign, refine geography to Basin, and target audiences via environmental interests.	UNRBA members	 For each post made, record: Number of post clicks by type Number of shares, names of sharers when connected to key audience member or organization Number and tone of comments

Fast Facts Handout

The fast facts handout will be adapted from the information included in the multi-purpose infographic. It will give UNRBA members and their supporters an alternative for key stakeholders who would respond better to a more traditionally-formatted handout.

Fact sheets should be provided during all first-time meetings if the infographic is not shared. Members should also offer copies of the fast facts handout to elected officials who support the UNRBA's mission and goals to share with their constituents. Basic information on distribution



should be recorded and maintained to understand how the tool is being used (e.g., number distributed, audience, and purpose of distribution). Recording recipients' reactions and responses to the fast facts handout will also help the UNRBA track and understand the extent and proactivity of its outreach activities among key audience members.

Presentation Template

A predesigned PowerPoint presentation with custom graphics will equip UNRBA members to share a curated, consistent message in their formal presentations. The shared look and message consistency will reinforce the group's identity across contexts.

While it is anticipated that the presentation will most often be delivered in person, it can also be given via webinar or recorded and included on the UNRBA website as a video resource.

In-person use will be tracked via reports submitted by the tool user through a Google Form. The reports will include:

- Presentation dates
- Audience and occasion
- Any content changes made to the template to customize for the audience
- Notes on audience questions related to the template (e.g., areas where clarification was needed)
- Qualitative observations, e.g., observable changes in level of understanding, uncertainties or objections expressed

SquareSpace Website

HDR will produce a simple, visually appealing website on the SquareSpace platform. This website will provide an approachable, easy-to-navigate online home for the UNRBA's key messages and informational resources.

Monthly analytics reports

Tracking trends and patterns in website visitation over time allows for strategic decision-making about online content. HDR recommends the production of a succinct monthly analytics report that summarizes information from Google Analytics on the following:

- Total sessions, new users, total users, average pages per session, average visit duration
- Visits by device type
- Visitor channels (i.e., referral, direction, organic search, social media)
- Views per page, cumulative appearances of page in top and bottom quintiles
- Top referral sites
- Top user locations
- Sessions per day (frequency graph)



 Using Google Alerts to automatically collect media coverage related to the UNRBA and the Falls Lake Nutrient Management Strategy, populate a table with the title, source, and date of relevant news coverage

Website best practices

Under current arrangements, the UNRBA will be responsible for the curation and maintenance of its SquareSpace website after it goes live in November 2018. The table below includes recommendations for its curation.

Recommendation	Examples / Explanation	Purpose
Update content at least monthly	 As-needed updates to permanent page content Board meeting agendas and minutes Information on significant regulatory or legislative actions as they occur Posts about an upcoming event, a new tool or resource, summaries of members' water quality accomplishment with links to more information, etc. 	 Keep website information current Providing value to viewers will enhance UNRBA's reputation as trusted source of information on water quality and management Search engines prioritize websites with fresh content
Use self- explanatory titles and headlines	All new document links, content tabs, and posts receive self-explanatory names that most first-time visitors would be able to understand	 Improves ease of navigation Viewer are more likely to click on and remember the details of well-headlined content Good post and page titles help search engines return content
Link new content to existing content	Newly added content includes internal links to background information or related topics that are already on the website	 Improves navigability Increases session length Allows brevity, decreases unnecessary repetition
Consider adding Facebook pixels	When the UNRBA begins to operate its own Facebook profile, insert "Facebook pixel" codes on key website pages to record visits. The tool will allow you to reach your visitors via paid posts on Facebook via Custom Audiences.	Ensures that paid Facebook posts (advertisements) are show to people who have already demonstrated an interest in UNRBA content



Recommended Tools

This table highlights additional items recommended for development and implementation in the medium-term, understood as six (6) to twelve (12) months from the creation date of this document.

	Description	Rationale	Delivery
Elected Officials Packets	Packets include: Letter from the Executive Director with link to website Multi-purpose infographic or Fast Facts handout Quarterly bulletin (below, if relevant) Summarized reexamination and status of work (would include recommendations, when relevant)	 Delivers concise and accurate information to a priority audience Provides easily accessible reference material for elected officials to consider in policy deliberations 	 Print for hand delivery and mail Electronic packets upon request
Quarterly Bulletin	A short, monthly email on a predesigned template that highlights: New developments, key issues, member accomplishments UNRBA's proposed approach / recent accomplishment Progress to date / call to action	 Provide fast, easily-digestible and shareable information with key stakeholders Communicate and coordinate on UNRBA's top initiatives and priorities efficiently Reinforces reputation of UNRBA as accountable, transparent and legitimate source of information Elevates credibility with stakeholders, and member representatives 	 Mailing list of key stakeholders from UNRBA stakeholder list and opt-ins from website Posted on website Links included in members' online communication channels



	Description	Rationale	Delivery
Water Quality Workshop	Annual event targeting key stakeholders, including those who have been less engaged with the UNRBA than desired. Key purposes include: • Fostering understanding of the UNRBA • Encouraging participation and ownership of efforts • Catalyze thinking about innovative approaches to water quality stewardship in the Basin	 Position UNRBA as a thought leader in industry space Provide valuable avenue to disseminate UNRBA message and network with key stakeholders Establish avenue for exchange of ideas 	In-person event; attendance by invitation recommended for early events
Video E- Minute	Short, self-produced (via computer webcam / audio and Soapbox extension), 30 to 60 second video highlighting one or more of these: • Key fact about the Upper Neuse River Basin • News-worthy update about UNRBA • Key issue and UNRBA's approach • Events, cosponsorships, etc. in which the UNRBA may be participating	 Facebook users alone watch an average of 100 million hours of video every day on the platform. Research indicates that viewers retain 95 percent of a message when it's in video. Simple, effective videos can be produced with minimum time, budget and technical ability. With alt text and transcript posted, video can help optimize SEO ranking for websites. 	 In a video library on website; quarterly to bimonthly production recommended Cross-marketed on member organizations' online communication channels
Fast Fact Monthly GIF	A simple monthly GIF highlighting a "Did You Know" fact about:	Social media algorithms de-prioritize text posts and boost animated/ video images and posts	Posts create a low- cost social media toolkit for UNRBA members. GIFs promoted on social



Description	Rationale	Delivery
 The Upper Neuse River Basin The reexamination Key issues in water quality protection / water resource management 	Alt text and long-tail keywords both on and behind posts allows for higher ranking of website content in search engine results	media channels of member organizations, and eventually the UNRBA if it opens its own accounts

Updating the Plan

This plan should be reviewed at least annually by the UNRBA's communication support contractor or, in the absence of outside support, by the UNRBA Communication Support Workgroup. Annual assessments will review tool use tracking records from the previous 12 months to determine how communication tools have been used in practice, where opportunities exist to deploy them more effectively, and where new tools or updates to existing tools would be most effective in advancing the purpose and goals of this plan.

This plan focuses on the UNRBA's key communication goals and objectives through 2023. After 2023, the UNRBA should revisit its key audiences, key messages, and communication tactics in light of its progress toward a revised nutrient management strategy and the ongoing regulatory and legislative actions needed to put the new strategy in place.



Appendix A: Sample Website Analytics Reports

Website Statistics: Year in Review

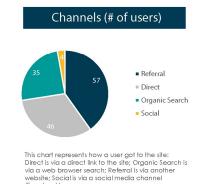
June 9, 2018 - July 9, 2018



	Total Sessions per Day		
30 —			
25 —			
20 —			
15 —			
10 —			
5 —			
0			
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Website Statistics: Year in Review

June 9, 2018 - July 9, 2018



Top Referral	Sites
Co.union.nc.us	40
Norwoodgov.com	1
unioncountync.gov	ī

Top Cities (# of users)	
Jacksonville	225
Charlotte	17
Monroe	16
Indian Trail	11
Raleigh	6
Ashburn	5

